

[By Dave Gram](#)

Gov. Peter Shumlin and U.S. Rep. Peter Welch said on a visit Wednesday to a town hard hit by Tropical Storm Irene that plans to buy nearly \$20 million worth of flood-prone property with state and federal money have gotten under way.

Flooding from the Aug. 28 storm took the lives of at least six people and caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damage. Irene is widely viewed as the worst natural disaster to hit Vermont since the flood of 1927.

The official visit Wednesday drew more than 60 people out in chilly temperatures to the Northfield firehouse. Shumlin told of one of the 13 Northfield households flooded during last year's storm when the Dog River overflowed its banks.

"We all knew that it would be unlikely that it would be wise to return to that home, ever, because it had been flooded before and with a climate change future it was clear that it would get flooded again," the governor said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency will pay 75 percent of the \$19.8 million in hazard mitigation grants; Shumlin said he was working to ensure the state will pay the remaining 25 percent.

"The state is committed to doing everything we can to make towns and property owners whole under the program," Shumlin said.

Bonnie Pemberton, who with her husband, Michael, will take advantage of the buy-out program, said neighbors, co-workers and strangers showed up to help in the days following the storm. "We had out-of-staters in our basement, digging the mud out," she said.

Michael Pemberton said the family's home could not be saved. The Pembertons have been staying at the home of a friend, and said their future will remain uncertain until they get a final settlement from FEMA, which they don't expect until August.

If FEMA gives final approval to the plan, the money will go toward 72 projects around the state, mostly properties damaged during Irene or by flooding during heavy rains in May. Because the low-lying properties will most likely flood again, officials have decided it would be better to buy them, get the owners to relocate, then turn the properties into preservation land.

Shumlin spokeswoman Susan Allen said the administration expects FEMA will approve all 72 projects. Those include 76 primary residences, 22 rental properties and seven commercial properties. Also, five towns are in line for funding for drainage projects.

The projects are spread across dozens of communities. They include Waterbury; Northfield; the White River Valley towns of Rochester, Stockbridge and Bethel; and southern Vermont towns, including Chester and Newfane.